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House of Representatives

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN ED CASE OF HAWAII WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21, 2006

HEALTH CENTERS RENEWAL ACT OF 2006

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the Health Centers Renewal Act of 2006 (H.R. 5573), which would authorize appropriations for Fiscal Years 2007-2011 for health centers to meet the health care needs of our medically underserved populations.

Health care centers (aka Federally Qualified Healthcare Centers (FQHC)) provide essential services to our communities. More than a thousand FQHCs serve over 15 million people in 3,700 communities across the United States. FQHCs not only provide primary and preventive care, but also meet emergency care needs in their communities. My State of Hawaii has 13 FQHCs across the state, and 10 of which are in my district alone.

We are all well aware of the important role of FQHCs in providing cost-effective, quality health care to our poor and medically underserved communities. FQHCs exist in areas where economic, geographic, or cultural barriers limit access to primary health care for the working poor, the uninsured, and many high-risk and vulnerable populations. More important, these health care centers tailor their services to specific community characteristics and needs.

When Congress established the FQHC system nearly 40 years ago, we intended a unique public-private partnership by providing direct funding to community organizations for the development and operation of these healthcare centers. Federal grants, on average, constitute 24 percent

of the annual budget of FQHCs by assisting communities to find partners and recruit doctors and other health professionals. Today's passage of H.R. 5573 will continue that time-proven commitment and mission by helping to reduce health disparities, meeting health care needs, and providing a vital safety net in the health care system across our country and especially in my home.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support the Health Centers Renewal Act and urge its expedited passage in the Senate.